UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

School of English

Sophister Examinations
English Studies &
Two Subject Moderatorship

Trinity Term 2009

Tragic Patterns in Ancient Drama

Wednesday 20th May

Exam Hall

09.30-12.30

Dr Andrew Power

Answer three questions.
Your answers must deal substantially with three of the four dramatists on the course.
Be careful not substantially to repeat material.
All questions carry equal weight.
Please use separate answer books for each question.
1. "A ruthless resolver of their strife was that stranger from beyond the sea, the whetted steel, sped forth from fire; and ruthless was the cruel apportioner of their wealth, Ares, who made true their father's curse" (Septem, 940-946). Is Septem Contra Thebas simply a play about the fulfilment of a curse or is it a play about character?

2. Is Persae a play about the just punishment of hubris (pride)?

3. Write about the relationship between myth and tragedy in Aeschylus' Supplices.

4. To what extent are Clytemnestra's actions justified in Aeschylus' presentation of her in Agamemnon?

5. How useful is it to describe Choephoroe as a "domestic tragedy"?

6. Write about dike (justice) in the Eumenides.

7. "Art is feebleer than necessity" (Prometheus Bound, 514). Discuss the conflict between art (tekne - often used of prophecy) and necessity in Prometheus Bound.

8. Sophocles' heroes are noted as being described as 'deinos' (terrible/wonderful). How does Ajax fit the mould of the Sophoclean hero?

9. Antigone is a play about the responsibilities of good leadership and the duties of citizenship. Discuss.
10. “I, even before I have passed to the world of death [Hades], know well that my life sorrowful and bitter” (*Trachiniae*, 4-5). Write about death in *Trachiniae*.

11. “It is incredible that Sophocles, with the moral cruelty and indifference of certain scientific novelists, should have dramatized this dreadful tale to show what the actors in it were like” (Kitto). Is Sophocles’ *Electra* a play without a moral outlook?

12. “What is this new clamour of shouting by the cave?...Alas! It is something bad!” (*Philoctetes*, 1263-6). *Philoctetes* is a play about things that offend the senses; noises, visions, smells. Discuss.

13. The enigmatic phrase “know thyself” was carved on a column of the temple of Apollo at Delphi by the “seven sages”. Discuss its significance in relation to Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

14. “A pledge, and ruin is near.” Discuss how this maxim applies to Euripides’ *Medea*?

15. “May no one else from another house come and rule the city, none save the noble Erechtheids!” (*Ion*, 1056-60). Write about purity of birth and xenophobia in Euripides’ *Ion*.

16. How does the rural setting of Euripides’ version of *Electra* affect our understanding of it?

17. Aristotle thinks Euripides’ *Orestes* a bad play because his portrayal of Menelaus is an example of “motiveless degradation of character” (*Poetics*, XV. i.). Is this a pertinent criticism of the play?

18. In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, is Dionysus an enigmatic mortal, a liberating force, or a vengeful and destructive deity?
19. Euripides’ *Heracles* offers us a portrait of the hero in his labours. Is this play more about the image of the hero than the tragedy of a hero?

20. “I honour those who reverence my power, but I lay low all those whose thoughts to me are proud” (Kypris / Aphrodite in *Hippolytus*, 5-7). Can we take what the gods say in this play at face value?

21. There are no justifications for Medea’s actions in Seneca’s version of the myth. Discuss.

23. “The hour that first gives life, erodes it” (*Hercules Furens*, 874). Is Seneca’s version of the Hercules myth more an expression of a philosophy than a tragedy?

24. Write about time in Seneca’s *Thyestes*.

25. Write about any one of the following in any play(s) that you have read for this course: speech and silence; the oikos; tyranny; the ship of state; divine intervention; the chorus; the skene.